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Tenth Meeting, Monday, April 14th, 1862.

LORD ASHBURTON, PRESIDENT, in the Chair.

ELECTIONS.—*Commander E. John Pollard, R.N. ; Colonel C. Palmer Rigby ; Isaac Braithwaite ; Richard Cockerton ; James V. H. Irwin ; John Jones ; Charles P. Pauli ; and James T. White, Esqrs., were elected Fellows.*

ACCESSIONS.—Among the Accessions to the Library and Map-rooms since the former meeting were — Pugh's 'Queensland Almanack,' with Map ; Sheet No. 8 of Dufour's Atlas of Switzerland ; seventeen sheets of the Topographical Map of the Netherlands ; Maps of Savoy and Piedmont ; Canton of Glarus ; Pontine Marshes ; Gulf of Japan, by Malte-Brun ; Ordnance Maps ; Admiralty Charts, &c., &c.

EXHIBITIONS.—Views of the Fiji Islands, and specimens of their natural productions ; Panoramic View of the Kashmir Mountains ; and Ziegler's Geological Map of the World, were exhibited.

The Papers read were :—

1. *The Fiji Islands, their Commercial Resources, &c.* By Mr. BENSUSAN.

2. *Remarks on the late Government Mission to the Fiji Islands.* By BERTHOLD SEEMANN, Ph. Dr.

DR. SEEMANN was a member of the Commission sent under Colonel Smythe, R.A., to investigate circumstances connected with the proffered cession of the Fiji islands to the British Crown. The islands are now visited by traders from many nations ; and the object of their inhabitants in appealing to England, was to extricate themselves from political embarrassments which were becoming fastened upon them.

The report of the Commission was favourable to the bonâ fide nature of the proposal and also to the value of the islands as fertile, healthy, and convenient stopping places for the traffic to Australia by way of Panama. The question of the acceptance of their sovereignty was under the consideration of the British Government.

The Fiji group owe their origin to a volcanic uprising and to the growth of corals ; the islands are usually hilly, and present an unbroken mass of trees on their southern side, while their northern slopes are grassy and watered by streams descending from the central highlands, whose ridges condense the vapour of the trade-winds.

A great variety of vegetation is found in the islands: its predominant appearance is tropical. The mangrove-swamps are confined to the deltas of the rivers, and the islands are singularly exempt from malignant fever.

Their fertility may be estimated from the fact that, though partially and imperfectly cultivated, they support a population of 200,000, and supply provisions to foreign vessels and yield an immense export of cocoanut-oil, obtained by a wasteful process. Their fertility appears still more remarkable on considering the variety of their vegetable productions useful to man. Sugar, coffee, tamarinds, and tobacco are cultivated with success; so are four oil-yielding and five starch-yielding plants; four different spices; twelve edible roots; eleven potherbs; thirty-six edible fruits; and a vast number of medicinal, fibrous, scent-yielding, and ornamental plants, besides a long list of first-class timber-trees. It was the abundance of sandal-wood that first attracted Europeans to their shores.

They promise an excellent field for the best qualities of cotton; the undulating ground, the neighbourhood of the sea, and the absence of frost being cogent reasons in favour of its growth: the inhabitants are also beginning to work for wages. Experiments in raising cotton have already been tried with remarkable success, both by the author and by others.

Dr. Seemann bears witness to the laudable influence of the Wesleyan missionaries over the islanders, who recently were savage cannibals. He considers the religion which Christianity is beginning to supplant, as well worthy of philosophical study. Their belief is in a Supreme Deity, and in future rewards and punishments. They worship their ancestors. The chiefs are a taller, better developed, and in every respect a more able caste of men than the rest; it follows from this that mere height of stature in a stranger is an important claim upon the consideration of the islanders.

Mr. Bensusan's paper was chiefly an elaborate compilation from recent authorities on the Fiji group. While he acknowledges the extreme fertility of the islands and the skill of the natives in agriculture and rude mechanical arts, he doubts whether labour can be procured for extensive cotton-culture. He says the natives will positively not work; that they have no wants. The spontaneous supply of food far exceeds what they are in need of. They make their own scanty dresses, build their own houses, make their own canoes, their own mats to lie upon, their own pottery utensils for cooking, and are independent of the white man, though they fear him and respect his ingenuity. Printed cottons, hardware, groceries,

and other articles, which are wholly unsaleable elsewhere, are shipped to Fiji. Many persons are already engaged in trade, and there is room for more.

After the Papers had been read,

The Rev. GEORGE PRITCHARD (formerly Her Majesty's Consul at Tahiti) said, having occasionally visited the Fiji group during the thirty-three years that he had spent on the islands in the Pacific, he could bear testimony to the truthfulness of the statements made in the papers which had just been read. The beauty of the scenery must be seen to be appreciated. Of the many descriptions by voyagers, he had seen none that in his opinion had done justice to those "gems" of the Pacific Ocean. They were remarkably fertile, and most of them possessed valuable seaports, which ships of any draught could enter without difficulty, and anchor in safety between the coral-reef and the shore.

With reference to the cession of the Fiji islands, he thought it most desirable, both on political and commercial grounds, that the proposition should be favourably entertained by the Government of this country. In a political point of view, it would be good policy on the part of Great Britain to possess themselves of the Fiji group, in order to arrest the extension of French influence in the Pacific, which, with the possession of Tahiti and New Caledonia already in their hands, would be attended with serious inconvenience to us in case of war with that power.

Commercially, the possession of these islands by Great Britain was exceedingly important. In view of the difficulty of obtaining cotton from the United States, it is very desirable that we should have independent sources of supply. If properly cultivated, the Fiji islands were capable of producing an immense quantity of excellent cotton, equal in quality to the best of that grown in the United States; and not only on the Fijian islands, but it could also be largely produced in the other groups of islands, where he had seen it growing luxuriantly, at all times. One remarkable circumstance connected with the growth of cotton in the Pacific was this: in the United States, he was informed, the cotton-seed was planted annually, and bore only one crop; on the South Sea islands the seed, when once planted, would continue to bear perpetually for from ten to fifteen years.

There was another important point connected with this subject, which deserved the consideration of shipowners. At present, ships carrying out cargoes to Australia had the greatest difficulty in obtaining return cargoes, and many of them, he was assured, came back in ballast. He had known ships himself to go 4000 miles in search of a cargo. Now, if cotton were grown on the Fiji islands, vessels returning by way of Cape Horn could easily call at these islands, load with cotton, and bring it home at a moderate freight. The islands possessed admirable harbours, in some of which ships of any burden could enter without difficulty, with plenty of room to beat in and out even in a contrary wind.

Then, the islands produced immense quantities of cocoa-nut oil, arrow-root, *bêche-de-la-mer*, timber suitable for ship-building, and fancy woods for furniture; so that a valuable commerce could be carried on. He was delighted to see in the *Times* the other day an article, stating that during the last year our commerce with the South Sea islands was treble what it was in the preceding year. This showed how commerce was extending, and if our Government would accept the cession of the islands, he believed it would result in opening up a large and valuable commercial intercourse with this country.

The PRESIDENT wished to ask Dr. Seemann a few questions bearing upon the growth of cotton. In the first place, he should like to know what the tenure of land was in the islands, because if the land was altogether occupied by the

natives, and we were to take possession of the islands, we should find ourselves very much in the same position that we found ourselves in New Zealand, where quarrels soon broke out. Therefore he would ask whether there were any unoccupied lands which our colonists could take possession of? Secondly, as we were told the natives would not labour, he should like to know whether there was a prospect of obtaining labour from the neighbouring islands, instead of sending for Coolies?

DR. SEEMANN said land in the Fiji islands was owned by a class of gentry, who seemed to have a perfect right to dispose of their land with the consent of their chief. A great deal of land had been disposed of by these people at good prices, with which all parties appeared perfectly satisfied. Generally, after a bargain, they went to the British or American Consul and registered the sale. He did not think any disputes had arisen about the selling of the land. With respect to labour, he believed it could be procured without difficulty. The Fijians were agriculturists and cultivated a number of plants, taking great pains with them. Besides, the neighbouring islands would furnish labourers. It was found that the Polynesians would work better when removed from their native to other islands. The Fijian islands contained a great many Polynesians. There was a cocoa-nut establishment, employing sixty men or more, all active fellows. They were well paid, and were cheerful and contented. He did not think there would be any difficulty at all about the labour; in fact, he had gone into that question in his official report.

THE PRESIDENT: Would you state what facilities there are for the cultivation of cotton?

DR. SEEMANN stated that cotton grew very rapidly indeed. There were six different kinds of cotton already naturalised in the islands, which had been brought there by traders. The cotton grew wild, and produced a very good crop. He had himself established a plantation which, after the first three months, began to yield. It was New Orleans cotton, quite equal to the best American cotton. It was certainly true, as the Rev. G. Pritchard stated, that the seed, when once planted, would produce crops for several years. The plant was never killed by frost.

MR. CRAWFURD said he differed very considerably from the two gentlemen who had addressed the meeting. He would first point out what might be called Oriental Negroland. It commenced in New Guinea or Papua, at the Equator exactly,—ran down very nearly to the tropic of Capricorn, and then ran up to the north-east, terminating at these very islands of Fiji. The people were here all negroes; but negroes of distinct races, differing in language, in person, and in intellectual qualities.

The negroes of Papua or New Guinea were a very powerful, stalwart race. Some of them he had seen, bore a considerable resemblance to African negroes, but they were a totally different race from them. The negroes of the Fiji islands were of the same general description, with many minor differences. Between these two principal branches of the negro race there were others of a very inferior class. He believed the Fijians, one and all, were, or had been, cannibals; such at least as had not been converted by those bold, intrepid, conscientious men, the missionaries, who had been doing a world of good among them, and had eradicated the practice in many places. In Captain Erskine's book, written some years ago, there was an account of thirteen captives who were brought in, and before the missionaries or their wives could interfere, ten out of the thirteen were roasted and eaten: the remaining three were spared through the intercession of the wives of the missionaries. He believed also, on the authority of Captain Erskine, that the immolation of parents still continued.

There were some curious differences between these people and the Polynesians, or brown-complexioned race of the islands of the Pacific. The Polynesians, for example, could never pronounce an English or any other European word,

Every word with them must end with a vowel; indeed, every syllable also: whereas the negroes, on the other hand, could pronounce English perfectly, for they had an abundance of consonants. The Polynesians, who were a fair race, had not above half-a-dozen, or at most eight or nine consonants.

Then there was another distinction which Captain Cook drew, and which was true still. The Polynesians, the fairer race, were all thieves—dexterous thieves; the negroes were all honest, and Captain Erskine said that, notwithstanding their many vices, referring to cannibalism and the immolation of their parents, they were upon the whole a most energetic race, and he had higher hopes of them than of any other in the whole of the Pacific Ocean.

To come to the cotton question, he could not conceive anything more at fault than the statements of the previous speakers. These islands, if they could all produce cotton, would not yield a week's consumption for this kingdom. There was a very small proportion of the land of that country capable of growing cotton. The mountains were not; nor were the mountain sides; nor was the sea-shore, as was shown by the vast quantity of cocoa-nuts produced there. Cocoa-nuts grew in the sand; cotton would not grow in the sand. The cocoa-nut grew best close to the sea-shore, and would not thrive at any great distance from it; and the greater the quantity of cocoa-nut grown on these islands, the less the quantity of cotton that could be grown. The whole area of these islands was said to contain about 20,000 square miles. He could only make it 5500, and that would never suffice for an abundant supply of cotton even if the entire surface were cultivated with that plant. It might produce very fine cotton, equal to Sea Island cotton; but as to producing 800 lbs. per acre, that is what no cotton ever did. He had paid considerable attention to South Carolina and Georgia cotton, which was what was called Sea Island cotton, as it must be grown near the sea-side; and the average produce was 150 lbs. per acre, whereas the average of the inland cotton was nearer 300 lbs.

With respect to the cession to this country, he believed Her Majesty's Government had not the slightest intention to take the Fiji islands. He hoped they never would. The islands would be totally useless to us, and a burden; indeed, we already had too many of this class of colonies.

SIR EDWARD BELCHER said he really hoped with all his heart that the British Government would accept this cession. We required some port in those seas to enable our vessels to refit as well as enable us to watch our enemies in time of war. He was quite sure that the Americans would be too glad to take the islands if we rejected them. They were situated on the line leading to China. Any vessel wishing to make a rapid passage, if she fetched the Fijis, could complete her water and make a clean run outside the Philippine islands to China.

With respect to cotton, he thought Mr. Crawford was greatly in error. He was inclined to take the part of the other two gentlemen. He had visited nearly all the islands in the South Seas, as well as the western intertropical coasts of America, and he found that cotton grew luxuriantly in every part. In the Sandwich islands Captain Charlton, our consul there, persuaded the natives to cultivate a very large portion of ground. The cotton was of the finest quality, and the Americans who had settled there declared it as fine as they had ever seen produced in America. But a change came over the mind of the American missionaries. Whether they were jealous of cotton being grown there or not, they persuaded the natives that it was impious to grow cotton, when the land produced them food enough without. They compelled the natives to root up every tree and destroyed the whole of the cotton in the Sandwich islands. That happened in 1825 or 1826. At Tahiti, about the same time, they found cotton also under cultivation in small patches in gardens; it produced very large pods and very fine staple. He had also travelled through the cotton-growing countries of America, particularly about New Orleans and Texas. He found there, although the temperature sometimes fell as low as 12°, that

the staple was as fine as it was in any other part of America. He felt perfectly confident that, better than bringing home a cargo of timber or coming home in ballast, it would be a very great advantage if our merchant vessels coming home from Australia could pick up a cargo of cotton.

There were many other articles grown in the Fiji, of interest to us, besides cotton. The islands abounded in fruit and in cocoa-nuts. Indeed, the natives planted cocoa-nuts because they had nothing else to plant for export. In seven years every cocoa-nut planted was valued at four shillings sterling; consequently, where they had only the cocoa-nut tree to plant and could allow nature to rear them up, it was not worth their while to cultivate the ground. But if we could make it an object with them to cultivate the land, he had no doubt they would produce good cotton, and, with care, equal to any that we got from America.

The islands also produced fancy woods and fair timber. With respect to timber, there were no good spars produced, after leaving Australia, until you reach the Fijis. None of the timber of the other islands for spars was worth a farthing, being very porous and not possessing the requisite density and elasticity; therefore, should a vessel lose her spars, the timber of the Fiji islands would be found very serviceable.

SIR RODERICK MURCHISON announced that Dr. Seemann was about to publish, at his own expense and risk, an account, not only of the expedition, but describing in detail and with illustrations all the plants of these remarkable islands. There were many varieties of genera and species of plants which had hitherto been wholly unknown to the botanists and naturalists of Europe. He therefore hoped there were many gentlemen present, who, with the noble Lord in the chair and himself, would support the laudable publication of the 'Flora Vitiensis' by Dr. Berthold Seemann.

Eleventh Meeting, Monday, 28th April, 1862.

MAJOR-GENERAL PORTLOCK, VICE-PRESIDENT, in the Chair.

PRESENTATIONS.—*Isaac Braithwaite and F. J. Sargood, Esqrs., were presented upon their election.*

ELECTIONS.—*Sir Daniel Cooper; Captain R. J. Henry; Lieut.-Colonel Sir John Stephen Robinson, Bart.; the Rev. Thomas Scott; George Arbuthnot; Peter Bicker-Caarten; Charles Brett; G. Willoughby Hemans, C.E.; Henry T. Parker; Berthold Seemann, PH. DR.; Henry Sprigg; Henry Serry; George Tyler, and R. Dobie Wilson, Esqrs., were elected Fellows.*

ACCESSIONS.—Among the accessions to the Library and Map-rooms since the former meeting were—Vol. ii. of Messrs. Schlagintweit's 'India and High Asia,' with Atlas; Part xiii. of the 'Imperial Dictionary of Universal Biography'; Admiralty Chart of Shanghai and Environs; four sheets of Carnbée's Atlas of Netherlands India; Part ii. of Philip's Imperial Library Atlas, &c. &c.

The Papers read were :—

1. *The Surface Currents in the Bay of Bengal, during the South-west Monsoon.* By Lieutenant J. A. HEATHCOTE, I.N.

THE currents of the Bay of Bengal have not hitherto been accurately determined. Horsburgh gives a short general account, but his con-